Friday of Wrath: before I forget

a personal view

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After the successful launch on 25th, and the success of demonstrators in taking over the Tahrir square for 12 hours, the news started to show that the security forces is restoring its grip on things, the number of demonstrators declined gradually, and the newspapers started to tell of the "republic of Tahrir square that lasted for 12 hours" as a past. I couldn't keep watching afar, so I made my mind after a heated chat with my university friend Ahmed Nazeem, Kefaya activist since 2005 living now in the US, I prepared my luggage haphazardly in one hour on 27th morning, and took off to Frankfurt airport reaching Cairo in the evening. I observed the fade of the security grip in the airport, since I went through the usual control procedure smoothly although I looked, with my grown beard and single rucksack, like an example of a suspect. I went to Ramsis to stay in a hostel so as to avoid meeting my family, they wouldn't let me go! Yet the police state ruined my plan, once the receptionist looked at my ID card, he said "doesn't work! Security code prevents people from the same city to stay here!", I strolled in the streets thinking what to do, I decided I should go home before any secret informer gets suspicious. In the morning I called my study friend "Sabry", the demonstration coordinator in El-Manyal, then it was a Greek tragedy to persuade my family to let me go.

So I arrived at El-Manyal in the noon, I walked till the meeting point, to find two police secretaries watching. I looked around and found a slim young man standing in the street, I asked him (as a camouflage): "where's El-Manyal hospital?", he didn't know. I entered the closest masjid for Friday prayer, a very small one, I looked around and found three young faces that looked like they are up to something. I felt disappointed, three per masjid, and in El-Manyal there are, say, ten. I've never heard of a successful demonstration with 30 protestors! My ambitions went low, most probably I will spend the day demonstrating in the calm main street of El-Manyal until I lose my voice or get arrested, whichever comes first.

With the words of the half outspoken preacher, I started to doubt there will be ever any demonstrations! The theme was on the temptations coming from the west (like democracy and such nonsense) to destabilize our safe country. He concluded his preaching by inviting real believes to stay home and pray for the security and safety of our blessed country to last. I couldn't help thinking of the expensive flight I had to buy, would this trip go in vain? During prayer I only asked Allah not to let it go in vain! As soon as I finished prayer and was wearing my shoes to look for any demonstration, I heard shouting that rang so refreshing in my ears: "Allah akbar (God is great!)! Long live Egypt!", I hurried outside to find three men inviting people to join, I rushed to the main street to find around one hundred, mostly young men, but you'd also see the elderly, elegant ladies, and ladies carrying their babies! I got fully immersed with the chants, like a Sufi taken by the presence! "the people want to topple the regime!" ... the regime that deprived us of "bread, freedom, human dignity!", "the people want to topple the regime!" ... the regime that made the fruit seller at the start of my street a secret informer

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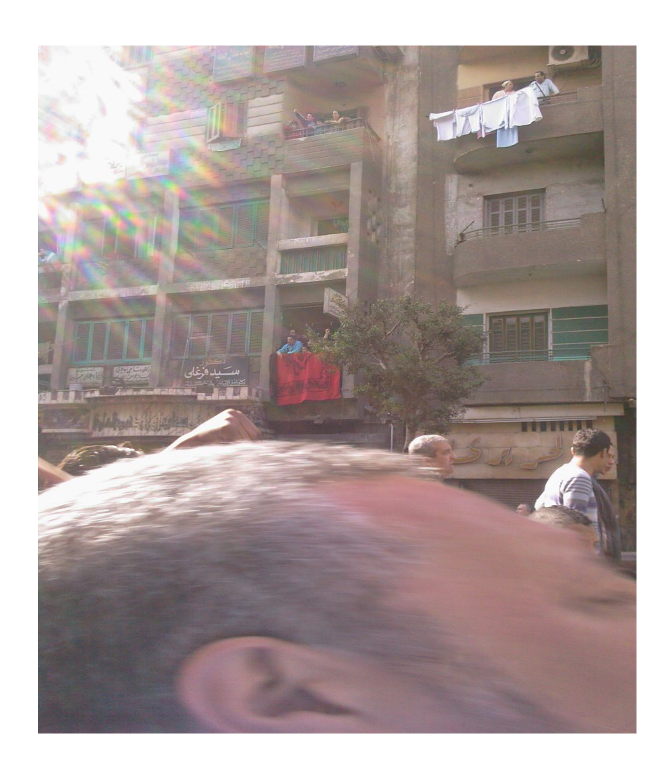


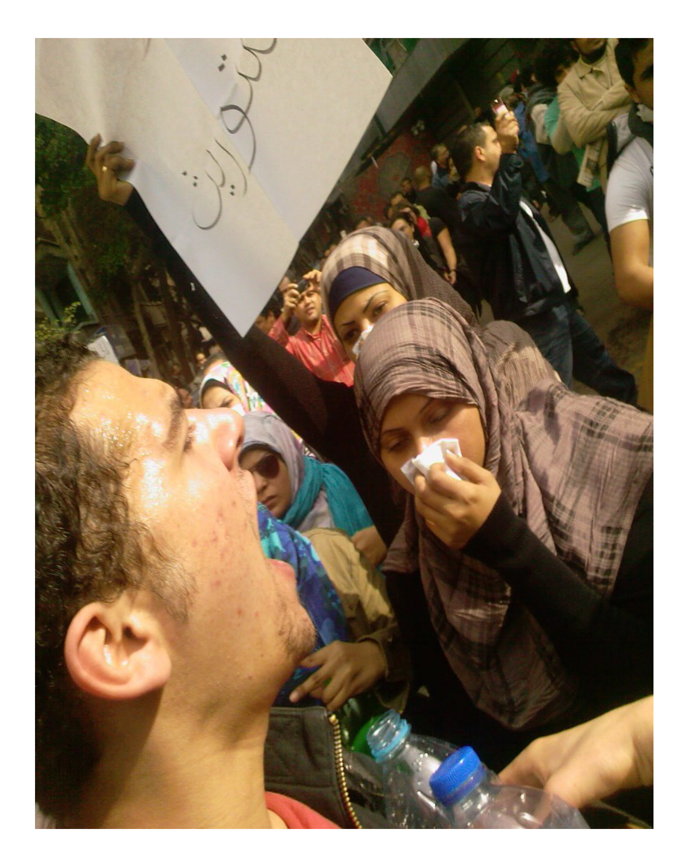
harassing people, that deprived my neighbors in the opposite street of bread till they hated their lives, themselves, and even hating us, those who just can earn our living! The regime whose one of the Atabegs (a Mamluk of high rank) transported my father, the financial manager, off his position when he didn't allow him to plunder public state funds, the regime that put a vulgar Agha (a Mamluk of low rank) at the gate of my university to get in my way and almost clashed with me just because "the entry card is old!", "the people want to topple the regime!" that brought on me the dirty smile of the Tunisian in Germany, and the impoliteness of the Lebanese in Beirut airport, when they knew I'm Egyptian ... "the people want to topple the regime!" just so as to "long live Egypt!". Right there I decided my role today, I will be a throat that keeps the chanting fire.

On both sides stood shop owners, people going out from prayers, women coming from market and standing in balconies, looking in curiosity and amazement ... some steps

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further I met Sabry, was was talking to the spectators: "join us, what are you waiting? We don't say but long live Egypt! We've been oppressed for 30 years, till when will we remain scared?!" most of them excused himself in the Egyptian way: "I'm chanting with you!" then he chants twice till we pass, however after two rounds in the street we found we are over three hundred, and there I learned that a demonstration is a demonstration has its own will that you cannot control! Otherwise, who've suggested that we take to Qasr El-Einy street with its police department, ministry, and ruling party office, in our way to Tahrir square, while we know for sure that the number is not enough, and that the square is now loaded with security forces, a trap with no outlets? But you can't lag for !the demonstration





Thus we started walked towards Sayyala bridge, we were met by a row of central security soldiers, along with their young officer, Sabry was the first to negotiate with him, we chanted all to show our good intentions "Peaceful! Peaceful! (demonstration)", after minutes of discussion, the young officer ordered the row open and waved to us to pass quickly! We greeted him with applause and chants "long live the police along with the people!", and his chief by a yell "are you breaking the orders?!"
we crossed the bridge and reached the start of Qasr-El-Einy street, at the first sensitive point, the police station, we found two armored vehicle blocking the way, I was in the front rows, I looked behind to find we were around three thousand, about half of us were elderly or women, not a

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single lady complained of harassment, and when some of us tried to stand on the parking cars, beat on the shops' doors, or throw stones at the police, people around would tell them off, and they'd stop immediately. I whispered "let it work out to the best!", I was hoping the regime would be smart enough not to oppress peaceful demonstrations, but I overrated their understanding, as the soldiers were quick to provoke protesters in the first row, they pulled them to the barricades and beat them up, while a water canon vehicle tried to disperse us, I still had the scene I saw on internet in my mind: the skinny young man standing still, facing a similar vehicle in Shobra, and withstanding the water beam without retreating even a bit until the metal monster was forced to stop. In a moment of reincarnation I stood facing the car with ten protestors, we were flooded by water, but the rest of protesters got encouraged and returned to line up beside us. Then they started firing the tear gas grenades. Most protesters were, like me, with no prior demonstrations experience, this is why the masses panicked as grenades fell, with the temporal blindness they cause, and even more when the police started to fire rubber bullets (there were (!rumors they used live ammunition



We couldn't stop those who started to throw stones at the police, they started with violence and ruined our peaceful demonstration. The situation was getting more dangerous with the intensification of the bombing and the spread of panic amongst protesters. The security forces used the quasi total lack of vision and started chasing us! This way I found my self running in a side street for five minutes until the stalkers stopped. I looked around and found only twenty protesters who I recognized as the ones

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throwing stones at the police! „perfect!“, I told myself. We walked aimless in the side streets. All main streets were loaded by security forces of informers, and we were dangerously too few, we'd all fit in just one police vehicle … everyone collected stones to resist in case we get arrested, and when we started to despair , we found rescue! A demonstration of several hundreds we saw from afar, we joined it running like crazy, we're back to the safety of blending with the masses! I found Sabry again, now limping because of a rubber bullet in his toe, and I met the same young man I asked in the .morning, Kamal



We were at the outskirts of El-Syedah-Zaynab district, we decided to march in the streets there to win new protestors, the streets which reminded me of Al-Waraq where I grew up, the poor, half-painted buildings of varied heights, the scattered coffee-shops and workshops, the faces divulging their hard lives. We started chanting again „join us, our people, freedom is for you and us!“, the national anthem, and the song „you, the dearest name in existence … “, I still remember the roar of the people answering: „o Egypt!“, only there these songs made full sense! Old ladies in balconies were praying for us, we didn't feel thirsty because people threw bottles of waters to us, also vinegar and onion to deal with tear gas. After thirty minutes of feverish chanting, I looked behind, and couldn't see the end of the street! The masses literally filled the horizon. The demonstration leaders, the men of El-Sayedah Zaynab now, decided to head to the police department nearby. We lined up in front of the department, with the usual security forces and vehicles, they started firing tear gas grenades, but this time, the masses were prepared, I witnessed the bravery of our people in poor districts, people would go away very calmly from where a grenade fell, and a masked young man hurried to it and threw it back at the police, and when they started to shoot rubber bullets intensly (I was standing beside a street lamp when I heard a bullet ringing just beside my face), our young men replied with Molotov! It took just twenty minutes for the security .forces to hurriedly withdraw, and some protesters broke into the police department

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At this moment, we decided walk back, since it was not a political demonstration any more. We reached Giza underground stop where some of us went home while we heard about a big demonstration reassembled in Qasr-Eleiny street. We decided, the three of us, to go there and join, when we arrived I've seen the same scene again: the wide street full of angry protestors who are no longer chanting for "bread, freedom, and social justice", they were chanting now to topple Mubarak and his regime, which fired at them tear gas and rubber bullets, and live ammunition in some zones, just because they went out asking for their rights in a perfectly civilized manner!"down down Hosni Mubarak", "o Gamal, tell your father, all the people hate you!", "Hosni Mubarak ... vicious!". The security forces fought fiercely to prevent our advance, but we stood firm at each strategic point they defended until their grenades run out, and they back to the next strategic point, and we win a new ground. We won the ground of the police department, the ministry, then we were met by a brutal defense at the ruling party office. All comments centered on the amount of grenades bought by the tax-payers money, and wasted just to oppress us. Our waiting dragged on with continuous bombing, I was not

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severely affected by the tear gas fortunately, some of our colleagues however were allergic to this gas, so we were busy helping them. When it appeared that their grenades were about to run out(we know this when they fire more sound grenades than tear gas ones), an ambulance car passed through the street, we let it go and it disappeared in Tahrir square. A few minutes later, the bombing intensified again, even more! We figured out that the ambulance car was full of ammunition, so we decided to examine every car passing in the street. The news came that two armored vehicles and security forces at the start of the street, blocking our way back. An air of tension spread, after one hour of continuous bombing, another ambulance car came, which was forced to stop, the driver fled, and ammunition was indeed found inside. It was getting dark and jumpy so no wonder that the angry protesters broke the car and used it to block the way from behind, and used the barricades to block the way in front, to prevent any try to clench us. Their grenades ran out so they backed to their last defense line, just at the edge of Tahrir square! No sooner had we won the ground of the ruling party office than a group of protestors entered and climbed the building towards their goal, a giant poster of Hosni Mubarak with a killer line of those we suffered for thirty years, : something like "together for stability and development" a boy showed up from the window and struggled to drop the provoking poster, while most of the protestors gathered waiting and commenting "burn it! Burn!", "haha! He can't drop him!", "he's glued, this song of ... ", "even in this?", then a collecting chanting "leave! Leave!" until he left, at least off the wall of his party! We lined up at their last defense line and we could see the square, the bombing intensified every time we tried to break into their lines. The hours arm hours approaching 8pm, we were dragging our legs and almost lost our voices because of chanting the whole day, and our allergic friends felt worse, so we sat down on the ground in a side street. The news were spreading: "Alexandria is free! They gathered one million protesters within an hour, so the police surrendered!", "Suez is free!", and in the sky military aircraft was roaming, a few minutes later we witnessed the shocking scene, the street full of innocent people, and in less than a second a white diplomatic car passed through with top speed and hit a mass of people, the assassinated bodies flew and the car disappeared even before the bodies rest on the ground! The street turned into a tragic scene, screams from everywhere and a group of protestors running after the car, I didn't dare have a look ... we tried with wrath feeling to break in to the square but we were met by more tear gas and rubber bullets. We got tired again so we went back to sitting in the side street, we noticed that their bombing now is relentless, I don't know why I remembered a scene of an Egyptian film "terrorism & barbecue" where the ministry of interiors threatened a terrorist: "the hostages you have now are already considered martyrs, and we will compensate their families! The government has no arms to be twisted!" true! With this government I don't guarantee anything! They besieged us here and can arrest us all or kill us all. In this moment, Sabry told us: "friends, if we die we are martyrs, be brave!", and that was the best advice! I recited what I memorize of Qur’an and gathered my courage, but I couldn't help letting out some tears when I remembered my mother crying in the morning and begging me not to go, and my promise to her to return. I prayed that I keep my promise. It was around 9pm when we felt a change in the air ... the bombing is still as intense, yet a feeling spread that the siege is loosening, spontaneously we decided all we are too tired to do any more help in

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demonstrations today, so we agreed to walk calmly using side streets in the way back to El-Manyal. And so we walked until we reached an open kiosk whose owner and his wife were watching a television, we asked them about the news, and they told us the charming, yet unconfirmed news: the army took to the street! I didn't believe in the beginning, the rumors are everywhere in such conditions, but they confirmed that the main streets are now safe. So we took a more direct way back, the people staying up late in front of television in the streets greeted us: "heroes! God bless you!". My breath quickened when I saw the army panthers in the street for the first time, on top of them were our dark-skinned soldiers with their clean uniform and confident faces. The ministry of interiors had truly failed and the army took indeed to the streets. Allah Akbar and long live Egypt! The Atabeg falls off his horse and crawls away before the horse walk over him, the Agha takes off his uniform and hides away, the informer returns to selling fruits not able to look anyone in the eyes ... today, and today only, we, the owners of this !country, have defeated the system of Mamluks

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